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SUBJECT: NEPAL: ARMY'S TRANSITION TO PEACETIME

REF: KATHMANDU 1178

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Morale and discipline remain high in the Nepal Army (NA) despite restrictions on training and the instability of the Government of Nepal (GON). EmbOffs found, during a trip to Western Nepal, the NA suffers from a severe shortage of supplies, and the soldiers do not receive pay on a regular basis. NA officers reaffirmed their commitment to the GON and vowed to remain apolitical regardless of which political party is in control. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) EmbOffs visited the 5th Brigade in the Kailali District, the 4th Brigade in the Banke District, the 22nd Brigade in the Rupandehi District, and the Jwala Dal Battalion located in the Bardiya District. The units had not conducted any combat operations since the end of the insurgency and no incidents had occurred between the local People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment camps or armed groups. Training supplies, to include ammunition and spare parts, were in short supply due to the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), which permits only non-lethal assistance. The CPA also confines NA units to military bases, limiting their ability to conduct large scale exercises.

¶3. (SBU) The limited availability of military supplies and prohibition against large-scale exercises led senior officers to question the readiness of the NA. Brigadier General Hari Bahadur Basnet, commander of the 4th brigade in Nepalgunj, in the Banke District, noted that although the quality of his soldiers has not decreased since the end of the insurgency, NA capabilities have declined due to the lack of supplies and training opportunities. Other NA officers said they understood that the NA's capabilities could never match those of neighboring China or India, and deduced the current size of 95,000 personnel was too large for Nepal. These officers believed the size of the NA should be reduced to the pre-insurgency level of 40,000.

Anti-Poaching Operations Maintain Military Effectiveness

¶4. (SBU) The Jwala Dal Battalion in Bardiya District was responsible for anti-poaching operations in the Bardiya National Park. The CPA explicitly permits the NA to protect national parks. The park includes 18 NA outposts with 93 civilian park staff employees and covers an area of 698 square kilometers. NA officers estimated that approximately 30 poachers are arrested each month. Following their arrest

the poachers are turned over to local law enforcement authorities. As part of these anti-poaching efforts, the NA regularly conducts patrols which may last up to three days. These operations are one of the few effective ways for the NA to maintain and develop patrolling techniques.

Army Maintains Quality Standard of Living

15. (SBU) Soldiers live in concrete barracks with concrete floors. The beds are constructed of cement and soldiers are equipped with a sleeping pad, blankets and sheets. Extra uniforms are stored in metal foot lockers located at the end of the beds. Some of the barracks have satellite televisions and internet connectivity is available in separate outbuildings. The dining facilities are clean and served traditional Nepali food twice a day. A delay in the budget approval process meant the soldiers had gone for over a month without pay. However, the soldiers appeared unfazed and said they had faith they would be paid when the money became available. (Note: This trip to Western Nepal coincided with visits to both military and police units. EmbOffs noted that the cleanliness and quality of life of the NA far exceeded that of the Nepal Police (reftel).)

Homogeneity in Personnel

16. (SBU) The NA is comprised mainly of male, Hindu soldiers. The 4th Brigade contains only one female, a lieutenant who stated that she had not experienced harassment problems and was provided her own living quarters. She was

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satisfied with her choice to join the military and was very proud to be an army officer. There are also very few non-Hindu soldiers in the NA. The 5th brigade contains one Muslim soldier, even though three to five percent of the Nepali population is Muslim, with the majority living in Nepal's southern Terai region. (Note: A NA Brigade consist of 3,000 to 3,500 personnel.) The 4th Brigade maintained good relations with the local Muslim community. The grave of a local Imam is located within the 4th Brigade Headquarters, 50 feet from the barracks. NA soldiers maintain the grave and sweep the site daily. Members of the local Muslim community visit the grave monthly in order to change the traditional cloth.

Comment

17. (SBU) Following the end of the insurgency, the NA has found itself without a clear purpose and looking for direction. The soldiers admitted the NA is too small to be a deterrent against India or China and too big for post-insurgency Nepal. Conflicts within Nepal have transformed into civil matters handled by civil authorities, such as the Nepal Police. Even so, the NA continues to be a well-disciplined, experienced army with dedicated leadership whose members view the army as the last bastion of stability in a country plagued with political infighting.

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